

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MARSEILLE 0013

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EPAP PINT FR IT

SUBJECT: REGIONAL FINANCIAL WRITER DISCUSSES WINE CRISIS IN THE MIDI

1. FRANCOIS LAINES, VETERAN CORRESPONDENT (SOUTHERN FRANCE AND ITALY) FOR FRENCH NATIONAL DAILY "LE NOUVEAU JOURNAL" VISITED CONSULATE JANUARY 6 TO DISCUSS WINEGROWING CRISIS IN LANGUEDOC. LAINES VISIT COINCIDED WITH "COMMANDO" ACTION BY VINTNERS OF HERAULT THAT DESTROYED 557 HECTOLITERS OF WINE ("PRESUMED" TO BE ITALIAN) BEING TRANSPORTED IN TANK TRUCKS AND PRECEDED BY ONE DAY PARIS MEETING BETWEEN WINEGROWERS OF MIDI AND MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE CHRISTIAN BONNET. LAINES, WHO HAS FOLLOWED PROBLEM BOTH IN FRANCE AND ITALY PROVIDED FOLLOWING BACKGROUND AND COMMENT.

2. BACKGROUND: RECURRENT UNREST AMONG WINEGROWERS OF LANGUEDOC IS DUE TO "UNHEALTHY BLEND OF NATURE, MAN AND POLITICS". POOR QUALITY OF LAND, PARTICULARLY IN DEPARTMENTS OF AUDE AND HERAULT, UNWILLINGNESS OF SMALL VINEYARD OWNERS TO ADAPT NEW METHODS, AND FAILURE OF SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS TO COPE FIRMLY
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WITH SITUATION FOR POLITICAL REASONS HAVE COMPOUNDED PROBLEM.

INHERENT DISTRUST OF GOVERNMENT AND HISTORIC LEFT WING TENDENCY OF LOCAL VINTNERS THAT LED TO VIOLENT REVOLT IN 1900'S, EARNING LANGUEDOC TITLE OF "MIDI ROUGE" AND SAW REVOLT OF ARMY TROOPS SENT TO PACIFY REGION, STILL EXISTS. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BULK WINE DEALERS IN SETE, BEZIERS AND MONTPELLIER (WHO NEED 14 DEGREE ITALIAN WINE TO STRENGTHEN POOR QUALITY, LOCAL 8 DEGREE WINE) AND ACTIVIST VINTNER WITH SMALL OUTPUT, IN PAST, WEAKENED WINEGROWERS CAUSE. IT HAS ALSO REINFORCED COMMUNIST INFLUENCE AS PARTY CLAIMS TO BE CHAMPION OF SMALL LANDHOLDERS. SEVERAL REGIONAL PREFETS HAVE RECOMMENDED TEARING UP PRESENT LOW PRODUCTION VINES AND REPLACING THEM ONLY ON PRODUCTIVE LAND BUT GOVERNMENT HAS MET CONTINUED CRISIS WITH "DISGUISED SUBSIDIES AND CINEMA".

3. COMMENT: 1) LACK OF PROSECUTION OF VINTNERS WHO DESTROYED 450 METERS OF RAILROAD TRACK WITH BULLDOZER AT MARSEILLAN, HERAULT, ON DECEMBER 29 HAS ENCOURAGED "HOTHEADS" IN MOVEMENT.

2) TEARING UP OF VINES AND THEIR REPLACEMENT WOULD REQUIRE AT LEAST FOUR YEARS OF GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY BEFORE VINEYARDS COULD BECOME PRODUCTIVE AGAIN. EVEN THEN, QUALITY OF PRODUCTION REMAINS QUESTIONABLE.

3) ANY FRENCH GOVERNMENT MOVE TO BLOCK ITALIAN WINE IMPORTS WOULD DEAL BLOW TO MASS WINE MARKET IN FRANCE (MARGNAT, INC) POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT ITALIANS WOULD COUNTER BY CUTTING HEAVY IMPORTS OF FRENCH VEAL.

4) STRONG REPRESSIVE MEASURES BY GOVERNMENT WOULD ENCOURAGE REGIONAL SEPARATISTS AND BRING WAVE OF BOMBINGS COMPARABLE TO CURRENT SITUATION IN CORSICA.

POST COMMENT: LAINES, WHO KNOWS HIS SUBJECT WELL, ADMITS THERE ARE NO EASY SOLUTIONS. HE FEELS TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT FORCE COULD BRING REAL VIOLENCE, TOO LITTLE, STAGNATION. HE SUGGESTS IT IS TIME FOR GOVERNMENT TO BE FIRM YET UNDERSTANDING AND ASKS "WHERE ARE THE GRADUATES OF ENA WHEN WE NEED THEM". FOLLOWING YESTERDAY'S MEETING WITH MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE COMMUNIST PARTY AND REGIONAL CGT "COMITE D'ACTION VITICOLE" HAVE CALLED FOR CONCERTED ACTION BY ALL UNION ORGANIZATIONS
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INVOLVED TO CLOSE RANKS IN PREPARATION FOR WINE GROWERS' MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC NEXT WEEK. MEANWHILE VINTNERS OF LANGUEDOC ARE GETTING LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THEIR COLLEAGUES ELSEWHERE IN PROVENCE.
SIMPSON

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